

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUITO 02398 122131Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 MCT-01 AID-05 CIAE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 ICA-11 PC-01 OPR-02 /082 W
-----107739 122136Z /64

P R 122047Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7906
INFO AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL
DIA WASHDC
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ
24TH CONTW HOWARD AFB CZ/IN

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PORS, EC
SUBJECT: PUBLIC DISORDER INCREASES

REF: QUITO 2336 (NOTAL)

1. DISORDERS IN QUITO REACHED THEIR PEAK APRIL 11, LASTING INTO THE EVENING HOURS. SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN OFFICIALLY CLOSED UNTIL APRIL 17. BUSES, WHICH ONCE AGAIN ATTEMPTED TO OPERATE IN THE MORNING, WERE ATTACKED AND SERVICE WAS SUSPENDED. AT LEAST TWO UNITS WERE COMPLETELY DESTROYED IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA. POLICE WERE PARTICULARLY HEAVY HANDED DURING THE DAY AND HAVE COME UNDER HEAVY PUBLIC CRITICISM. A LARGE ARMY UNIT (43 VEHICLES AND APPROX 375 MEN IN COMBAT GEAR) WAS SEEN MOVING THROUGH QUITO'S STREETS AT 2300. ALSO, GOE MOVED TO CLOSE TWO RADIO STATIONS ACCUSED OF BROADCASTING TENDENTIOUS RUMORS.

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2. ALTHOUGH STUDENTS HAVE BEEN PAINTED AS BEING LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE VIOLENCE RESULTING FROM THE 40 PERCENT BUS FARE INCREASE, AN ATTEMPT WAS MADE APRIL 11 TO BROADEN THE BASE OF PROTEST. A "MARCH OF THE POTS AND PANS" WAS SCHEDULED AT CENTRAL UNIVERSITY (A LA THE CHILEAN HOUSEWIFE'S MARCH) FOR THE AFTERNOON IN AN EFFORT TO PROTEST AGAINST THE CONTINUING RISE IN THE

COST OF LIVING. HEAVY RAINS AND POLICE ACTION DISSOLVED THE MARCH.

3. QUITENOS GENERALLY REMAIN CONFUSED ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE AND REAL CAUSE OF THE CONTINUED DISORDER. THERE IS NO CONSENSUS AS TO WHO IS DIRECTING THE VIOLENCE AND THE EVENTUAL CONSEQUENCES. HOWEVER, A GENERAL OPPOSITION TO POLICE TACTICS IS DEVELOPING. POLICE INADVERTENTLY TEAR-GASSED QUITO'S MAIN MATERNITY HOSPITAL AND A HOUSING PROJECT OCCUPIED PRINCIPALLY, AT THE TIME, BY WOMEN AND CHILDREN. THIS INCREASINGLY STRONG ATTITUDE MAY HAVE IN PART RESULTED IN THE DEATH OF A POLICEMAN INJURED IN THE FIRST DAY OF RIOTING AND IN THE APPARENT ESCALATION OF THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE BY THE RIOTERS. POLICE REPORTED THAT THEY CAME UNDER SMALL ARMS FIRE FROM A PARK IN THE CITY'S CENTER (TWO BLOCKS FROM THE EMBASSY.)

4. COMMENT: DESPITE THE DRAWN OUT CHARACTER OF THE DISTURBANCES, THOSE PARTICIPATING APPEAR TO LACK REAL ANGER. MOREOVER, THERE HAS BEEN SURPRISINGLY LITTLE PROPERTY DAMAGE, LIMITED MAINLY TO THE OFFENDING BUSES. PERHAPS MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, NO ONE IS YET DEMANDING THE END OF THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT. MANY MERELY APPEAR TO REGARD THE PRESENT PROBLEMS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR DIVERSION: BREAKING WINDSHIELDS IS FUN.
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5. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT ONE REASON FOR THE CONTINUATION OF THE VIOLENCE IS POLICE INEPTNESS. MANY AND VARIED RUMORS ABOUT GOE PROVOCATION OF THE INCIDENTS ARE CIRCULATING, BUT WE TEND TO DISMISS THEM. IF ELEMENTS WITHIN THE GOE HOPED TO PROVOKE A REALLY SERIOUS SITUATION, FOR WHATEVER MOTIVE, THE STUDENTS HAVE GIVEN THEM SUFFICIENT OPPORTUNITY. THE FACT THAT THERE HAVE AS YET BEEN NO REPORTED DEATHS AMONG THE DEMONSTRATORS APPEARS GOOD EVIDENCE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S GOOD FAITH.
CORR

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